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SNIE 83 L-2-83



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Near-Term Military Prospects for El Salvador

Special National Intelligence Estimate

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SNIE 83 L-2-83

14 December 1983

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NEAR-TERM MILITARY
PROSPECTS FOR EL SALVADOR

Information available as of 12 December 1983 was
used in the preparation of this Estimate.

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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL
INTELLIGENCE.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.

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Estimate:*

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security
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The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy
The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force
The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps

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SCOPE NOTE

This Estimate assesses the military prospects for El Salvador through mid-1984. The presidential election—now scheduled for 25 March 1984—will also have important implications for the military and the war effort. This will be addressed more fully in a future estimate on El Salvador.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

We believe the tactical stalemate between the Salvadoran armed forces and the insurgents of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) probably will continue, at least through mid-1984. If outside support to both sides continues at current levels, neither is likely to gain a decisive advantage in the near term.

With US support, the armed forces have expanded to a total strength of some 37,500, including defense and public security forces. The FMLN has now reached an effective combat strength of between 9,000 and 11,000 armed insurgents by upgrading its militia forces through training, experience, and the acquisition of weapons. These strength figures do not represent an increase in the total number of guerrillas but do reflect an important shift of those formerly regarded as "part time" guerrillas to "full time" fighters. The Salvadoran military now has a manpower force ratio of only about 4 to 1 over the guerrillas.

The guerrillas' combat effectiveness is judged to be high because of their sound war-fighting doctrine, excellent training, good communications and intelligence, and an ability to incorporate lessons learned from the fighting into their tactical and strategic thinking. The insurgents appear to do better at controlling the terms and pace of military engagements, use effective tactics, and are now capable of defeating isolated government units of up to the size of a "hunter" battalion. Their thorough use of intelligence is a major factor behind their survival and success on the battlefield.

Nevertheless, they lack widespread popular support, in part because of the popularity of agrarian reform and other government political and economic initiatives. Moreover, the guerrillas have not yet taken a major city and cannot tie down or defeat government strategic units. Logistic problems and factionalism also undercut insurgent effectiveness.

The FMLN has been following a strategy of military and economic attrition designed to cause the collapse of the armed forces and the government. The guerrillas probably view the national election scheduled for March as a major test of their forces, and we expect a campaign of increased urban attacks and terrorism. In addition, there are indications the guerrillas may attempt to seize and declare a liberated zone in northern or eastern El Salvador.

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Cuba and probably Nicaragua are likely to provide adequate supplies for an election offensive. The US force presence in the region, Salvadoran and Honduran interdiction efforts, and anti-Sandinista activity in Nicaragua have slowed, but not stopped, outside support to the FMLN. Logistic support, particularly from Nicaragua, may diminish in response to US pressure, but it probably will be adequate to sustain the guerrillas at least for a reduced level of operations. FMLN headquarters may move to El Salvador from Nicaragua, particularly if the guerrillas declare a liberated zone. It probably would be able to function within El Salvador at least through late 1984.

The insurgents will not be able to achieve victory without increased popular support, but, if they should get adequate logistic support, they are likely to pose a greater threat to US military and political objectives in El Salvador, especially the March election. The military will have to act aggressively to prevent the insurgents from seizing the initiative at the time of the election. If the guerrillas were to be successful in undermining the March election, their near-term prospects would significantly improve. Over the next year, the FMLN will be in a stronger position to exploit discontent if extreme right terrorism continues and efforts to roll back the reform process succeed.

US training and support have allowed the armed forces to grow and improve and have been a major factor in the military's present ability to prevent an insurgent victory. Four quick-reaction battalions and several special operations units have been organized, trained, and effectively used against the insurgents. The number of available junior officers has been increased significantly, and improvements have been made in the armed forces' technical skills. The armed forces can continue to expand, but the government's ability and resolve to mobilize fully against the insurgency will be seriously constrained by the military's shortcomings and by resistance from the country's military and economic elites.

The armed forces' mobility and logistic support, though increased, have not kept pace with operational and force requirements, and more ground and air transport is needed. More training for departmental and security forces is also needed, and communications assets and command and control concepts are still antiquated. Uncertainty concerning the adequacy and level of US assistance also has inhibited the armed forces' conduct of the war.

The quality of the officer corps is relatively high, but attitudinal problems within the corps will have to be overcome if the guerrillas are

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to be defeated. Resistance to change—both tactical and political—has impaired the ability of the officer corps to pursue the war effort optimally.

Most of the officer corps, while not opposed to reforms, distrusts the Christian Democratic Party and is susceptible to rightist political machinations that undercut its leadership and divert attention from military operations. Recent sweeping changes have placed most major commands under competent leaders and should ensure the near-term unity of the armed forces. However, these changes also have strengthened the hand of rightist officers and will inevitably impact on national politics before and after the election in March.

Despite such problems, there is little likelihood of an armed forces collapse in the near term. The officer corps is determined to defeat the guerrillas, and the enlisted ranks will fight well when properly supplied and led.

In the near term, the military is more likely to be successful if it moves to preempt rather than to react to guerrilla strategy. Reversing recent insurgent gains will be the military's most immediate challenge. The armed forces' ability to achieve needed tactical objectives will depend on continued US aid and the continued commitment of the officer corps to the war effort. If the officers become preoccupied with partisan political maneuvers, the guerrillas might be able to score a major military and psychological victory at election time.

The armed forces will be susceptible to US influence, but performance on human rights issues will continue to be mixed. The military prefers to adapt—rather than to adopt—US tactics, and it will be deeply stung by any public US criticism of its war effort.

Current levels of US assistance are adequate to enable the Salvadoran military to prevent an insurgent victory in the near term. However, the armed forces will require increased and sustained aid to overcome the present stalemate and eventually to defeat the guerrillas. Given the 4-to-1 military-to-guerrilla ratio—which is well below what historically has been required to defeat an insurgency—the Salvadoran armed forces' manpower and firepower will not be able to expand rapidly enough to gain a decisive advantage in the near term. However, US assistance that enhanced the military's mobility and communications would increase the tactical prospects of the existing forces until these forces could be expanded over the longer term.

Nevertheless, US military assistance alone will not solve all the armed forces' problems. Without improvements in Salvadoran military

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capabilities, some resolution of attitudinal problems in the officer corps, preservation of economic and political reforms, and neutralization of extreme right influences, the country's prospects for winning the war will be poor over the long term.

The foregoing Key Judgments section is classified ~~Secret Nojorn~~.

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DISCUSSION

1. The current military stalemate in El Salvador has been in effect for virtually the entire course of the war. Since the insurgents of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) launched their "final offensive" in January 1981, the tactical balance has cyclically shifted, variously favoring the guerrillas, the government, or neither side. During most of 1981, concern was high that the guerrillas might achieve sufficient momentum to cause a decisive shift in popular support to their cause, but Salvadoran military operations were at least adequate to keep the guerrillas off balance. (S-NF)

2. Improved Salvadoran military capabilities brought by US assistance and the armed forces' successful defense of the 1982 elections subsequently indicated that the government could contain and possibly defeat the insurgency, given adequate US aid. However, reduced levels of proposed US assistance, emerging leadership problems, and political infighting reduced the armed forces' effectiveness in late 1982 and much of 1983. The armed forces consequently lost opportunities to deal the insurgents decisive blows, permitting them to regroup, reorganize, and periodically regain the offensive. (S-NF)

3. The launching of the National Campaign Plan—Operation Maquishnat—by government forces in June and the subsequent guerrilla counteroffensive from September to November was the latest iteration of this trend. During the summer, government troops forced most of the insurgents from the centrally located Department of San Vicente, disrupting the FMLN's internal supply lines, and began efforts to establish the political, economic, and security infrastructure needed to preserve these gains. Meanwhile, the government for the first time was also able to put pressure simultaneously on guerrillas operating in several areas. After maintaining some 70 percent of its troops in the field for several months, however, the military's momentum and morale declined as logistic and leadership problems undercut further progress. (S-NF)

4. The guerrillas countered with increased actions, initially in eastern El Salvador, overrunning isolated towns and attacking the department capital of San Miguel. In early November the guerrillas routed two newly organized and US-trained "hunter" battalions in Cuscatlan and Morazan Departments, inflicting heavy casualties and equipment losses. Although the FMLN failed to achieve decisive momentum, its degree of success and the relative ineffectiveness of the government's response underscored the armed forces' tactical and logistic shortcomings and the deleterious impact of the military's structural and internal political problems. (S-NF)

Guerrilla Situation

Strengths

5.

[redacted] we estimate that the FMLN now has between 9,000 and 11,000 armed insurgents. We define armed insurgents as those elements within the insurgent military organization who are armed and pose a threat to the government of El Salvador. This figure does not represent an increase in the total number of guerrillas given in previous estimates—4,000 to 6,000 full-time guerrillas and perhaps an equal number of part-time militia members—but it does reflect an important shift of those formerly regarded as "part time" guerrillas to "full time" fighters. Substantial numbers of insurgent militia members have now become better armed, are more combat experienced, and consequently have been more fully integrated into the evolving guerrilla military structure. The numbers also indicate the Salvadoran armed forces have a manpower force ratio of only about 4 to 1 over the insurgents. (S-NF)

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Organization

6. The FMLN consists of five factions and continues to be organized in five geographic fronts. (See map, figure 1.) The Farabundo Marti Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) are still the two largest and most powerful factions. The ERP is concentrated mostly in the Eastern Front, while the FPL dominates the Northern and Central Fronts. However, the forces of all five factions are highly foot-mobile and capable of deploying throughout the fronts as tactical conditions dictate. (S/NF)

7. The guerrillas are well armed with a variety of modern light infantry and crew-served weapons. Their ability to capture weapons from government forces has been an important factor in their ability to upgrade their militia forces. (S/NF)

8. The FMLN now has accumulated enough modern weapons to arm nearly twice as many insurgents as in 1981. Battlefield gains—including the growing number of captured government weapons—and the cumulative total of weapons acquired through sustained infiltration since 1980 have significantly increased the FMLN inventory to a total of over 11,000 weapons. Although the exact inventory is unknown, sufficient data have been developed to demonstrate that enough modern weapons—mostly automatic rifles—are available to the FMLN to arm both the regulars and the militia. (S/NF)

Combat Effectiveness

9. We judge the combat effectiveness of the guerrilla forces to be high. Despite serious defeats suffered in two major offensives in 1981 and 1982, the insurgents demonstrated a remarkable ability to bounce back and effectively exploit tactical failures of government

forces. Development of insurgent war-fighting doctrine appears sound. Possibly as a result of self-criticism techniques, the insurgents do [redacted] at incorporating lessons learned into their tactical thinking. They also seem better able to reconsider their strategy and reorganize and reorient their forces to achieve more optimal use of available combat resources, at least within guerrilla factions. (S/NF)

10. The insurgents also appear better able to dictate the terms and pace of tactical engagements in most instances. They generally avoid major engagements except at times and places of their choosing. When the guerrillas do attack, they mass effective assault forces to isolate and destroy smaller government units while concurrently deploying adequate covering elements to harass, ambush, and interdict government reinforcements. (S/NF)

11. Guerrilla use of this tactic has steadily improved. While they were successful only against small, isolated outposts in 1982, the insurgents by early 1983 could overrun company-size positions. More recently, they have shown a capability against light infantry battalions when such units are poorly led and deployed. The guerrillas are also adept at psychological tactics and have been able to encourage the surrender of isolated and outnumbered government units. Meanwhile, the guerrillas continue to carry out a high level of economic sabotage, murders, robberies, and kidnappings and retain the capability for spectacular commando operations. (S/NF)

12. The guerrillas' ability to collect and—more important—to disseminate and apply intelligence will remain a major factor in the FMLN's success. The guerrillas repeatedly have received and reacted to intelligence of government operations by the armed forces. In addition, the guerrillas make extensive use of reconnaissance and penetration operations, and generally know the strength and disposition of government forces before an offensive action begins. The guerrillas moreover, are usually able to achieve surprise.

It also reflects in some instances poor interdepartmental coordination, the failure of Salvadoran commanders to react [redacted] and their proclivity to rely on static defense tactics rather than aggressive defensive patrolling. (S/NF)

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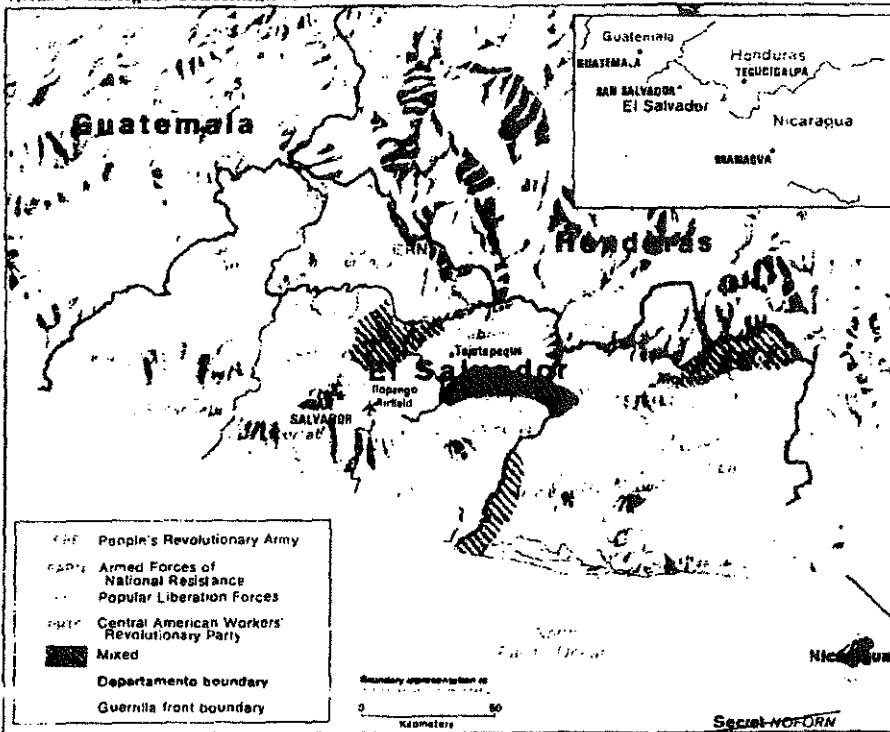
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Figure 1
Areas of Insurgent Concentration



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Weaknesses

13. The FMLN's greatest weakness is its continued lack of popular support. As a result of reforms, the democratization process, and government security efforts, the FMLN has been singularly ineffective in generating mass support in key urban centers. Nor have the guerrillas been able to seize a departmental capital. They are capable of maintaining some logistic infrastructure in the cities and of infiltrating personnel for terrorist actions and limited offensives, but they will have difficulty building an adequate base to overcome main departmental units or effectively engage the government's strategic reserve forces—two requirements for a successful final offensive. (S NF NC OC)

14. Internal factionalism will continue to plague the insurgents. Although the FMLN has probably recovered from the deaths of two FPL leaders last April, differences on tactics and ideology among the factions will continue to undercut unity of command and military efficiency.

prospect for resolving insurgent differences remain poor. (S NF NC OC)

15. Although the guerrillas have captured large numbers of weapons,

Increased interdiction operations have made resupply more difficult and have caused at least periodic shortages. Moreover, the need for clandestinity reduces speed and timeliness, and guerrilla factionalism is likely to continue to impair supply efficiency. Shortages of food, medicine, and financing have also had a negative impact on guerrilla morale. (S NF NC OC)

Strategy

16. While the FMLN for the most part appeared intent on following an insurrectional strategy for the first years of the war, the failure of the 1981 "final offensive" and the 1982 election offensive demonstrated that the tactical and political balance did not favor

a quick victory by the insurgents. The guerrillas have since opted for a war of attrition designed to wreck the economy through sabotage and to destroy and demoralize the armed forces through annihilation tactics. The guerrillas have targeted the government's quick-reaction battalions in particular, regarding their destruction as an essential step in establishing conditions for victory. The guerrillas reportedly hope that such tactics eventually will result in what they see as a "Vietnam-style" victory for the FMLN. (S NF NC OC)

17. Propaganda will continue to play an important role in portraying governmental and military collapse as inevitable, and in convincing the US administration and Congress that they are unable to affect the course of events. Concurrently, the insurgents will continue to use negotiations as an extension of the war by other means. Dialogue will be pursued for its image-building value and to develop a vehicle for facilitating a guerrilla takeover in the final phases of the struggle. However, the guerrillas will continue to resist calls to participate in elections as well as any proposals that do not provide them direct access to power or allow them to maintain their military forces. (S NF NC OC)

18. The FMLN has always viewed the defeat of the government in the Eastern Front as a primary objective, but factional differences periodically have undercut overall strategic cooperation. The strategy of attrition through annihilation, however, may achieve agreement at least in principle between the two largest groups: the FPL, which favors "prolonged war," and the ERP, which emphasizes aggressive large-scale operations. (S NF NC OC)

19. The FMLN will have much difficulty achieving its strategic objectives, given the armed forces' numerical superiority, continued US assistance, and insurgent lack of popular support.

the FPL's emphasis on prolonged war and the failure of all-out offensives in the past will probably keep the FMLN from adopting a "go for broke" strategy in the near term. Such developments, however, may make the guerrillas even more intent on

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demonstrating the viability of their struggle; they probably will view the coming elections as a major test of their strategy and forces. (S-XF-NC-OC)

20. The guerrillas are undoubtedly intent on using violence to disrupt the election, but their failure in 1982 has probably dissuaded them from attempting to mount a nationwide campaign.

the guerrillas will focus more on discrediting the election rather than trying to stop it. At least several factions may undertake increased urban terrorism to discourage voter turnout and possibly to eliminate candidates.

weapons could be used for small-scale operations in urban centers designed to provoke the military into using indiscriminate force.

Another raid on Ilopango Airfield or attacks on selected departmental capitals are also possible. (S-XF-NC-OC)

21. Moreover, the ERP's capabilities and strategy have developed to the point where it might consider a setpiece battle against San Miguel or another eastern city. In addition, the guerrillas might consider declaring a liberated zone in northern and eastern El Salvador in the belief this would distract attention from the election. The government's preoccupation with providing election security might also preclude an effective response to such a development. (S-XF)

Prospects for Outside Support

22. Since as early as last spring, Cuba and Nicaragua have become increasingly concerned over the possibility of a direct US military intervention in the region. The US action in Grenada has undoubtedly increased Havana's and Managua's concern, but the mid-to-long-term impact on the Salvadoran guerrillas is still uncertain.

24. We believe Cuba, Nicaragua, and their Soviet backers will not be willing to risk direct confrontation with the United States in the region, but neither will they abandon the FMLN. At a minimum they probably will provide enough covert assistance to support a short, intense, offensive coinciding with the March election. (S-XF)

25. Following the election, Cuba and Nicaragua are likely to reassess the FMLN's prospects in light of the internal Salvadoran situation and their perception of political and policy trends in the United States. They may elect to reduce assistance, forcing the insurgents to capture needed supplies. They might also reactivate or expand infiltration networks in

Such measures probably would be adequate to sustain guerrilla operations but not large-scale operations. (S-XF)

26. Managua may also choose to remove the guerrillas' command centers from Nicaragua. FMLN headquarters might be forced to deploy to El Salvador—perhaps in conjunction with the declaration of a "liberated zone"—but such a move would have only a limited impact on guerrilla operations. The insurgents' "Radio Venceremos" has existed for years in El Salvador, as did the headquarters of the various FMLN factions before moving to Nicaragua. (S-XF)

27. If moved to El Salvador, FMLN headquarters elements might be subject to periodic disruption by government operations, more guerrilla forces would have to be allocated to their defense, and some factional infighting might ensue over the location of factional or joint headquarters. On the other hand, the presence of major guerrilla leaders in-country might improve insurgent coordination. We believe the FMLN could maintain a headquarters in El Salvador at least through 1984. If Havana and Managua then foresaw a change in the perceived US threat, they might relocate it in Nicaragua. (S-XF)

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28. US force presence in the region, Salvadoran and Honduran interdiction efforts, and anti-Sandinista activity in Nicaragua will also impair FMLN resupply.

Anti-Sandinista activity has caused the diversion of some military resources from the FMLN to the Sandinistas, but overland infiltration apparently is continuing in sufficient amounts. The guerrillas were able to launch a significant counteroffensive from September through mid-November 1983 despite the US presence and increased guerrilla activity in Nicaragua. (S-~~REF~~)

The Salvadoran Armed Forces

Historical Context

29. The Salvadoran armed forces were ill prepared to cope with the sustained insurgency that began in 1980. Functional divisions that evolved between the military's national defense and internal security roles had created two poorly integrated groups of forces which, separately, were inadequate to meet the increased threat. The defense forces—consisting of the Army, Navy, and Air Force—were trained, organized, and equipped for conventional war, and were oriented toward protecting the nation from foreign attack, particularly from Honduras. The public security forces—composed of the National Guard, National Police, and Treasury Police—focused on maintaining internal order.

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Improvement and Impact of US Aid

31. As a result of US military assistance and training, the Salvadoran armed forces have expanded to

some 37,500 personnel. Four quick-reaction battalions have been trained as part of the country's strategic reserve forces, and their combat effectiveness is well respected by the guerrillas. The training of light infantry "hunter" battalions as departmental reaction forces is also proceeding. Specialized units such as long-range patrols and naval commando units have similarly been organized and used effectively inside guerrilla-dominated areas. Tactical employment has also improved. Small-unit operations and night ambushes have increased, at least by the better trained units. (C-~~REF~~)

32. Small-unit leadership has been qualitatively and quantitatively increased by training about 1,000 more junior officers and by programs to improve the existing corps of noncommissioned officers in strategic units. US assistance also has enhanced the skills of some maintenance elements and made some improvements to staff planning at both national and departmental levels. (C-~~REF~~)

33.

Meanwhile, US materiel assistance has increased the military's firepower on the ground and provided new assets to the Air Force to make up combat losses and improve mobility. Some limited additional naval assets have also been provided. (S-~~REF~~)

34. These developments have dramatically improved the size and fighting ability of the armed forces since 1980. They were a major factor in the military's successful defense of the 1982 election and its ongoing ability to prevent an insurgent victory. Nevertheless,

deficiencies are found in two categories: tactical and logistic problems, which undercut performance; and attitudinal and political problems, which create institutional impediments to the war effort. (S-~~REF~~)

* See annexes C and D for a detailed breakdown of US security assistance and training provided to the Salvadoran armed forces since 1980. (S-~~REF~~)

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Tactical and Logistic Problems

35. The military's logistic situation is chaotic. The overall structure is inadequate in terms of staff, distribution, inventory, and accounting procedures. Requisitions are not handled efficiently, and overcentralized control requires that even routine requests obtain high-level approval. Moreover, the General Staff seeks to retain a reserve of supplies against the possibility of a US aid cutoff. During one period in 1983, national-level stocks of one category of rifle ammunition dipped to 60 days' supply—or only 20 days' supply if aggressive operations were pursued. The ammunition situation in the field was even more precarious, causing departmental commanders to use their supplies sparingly. Such resupply uncertainty has constrained aggressive commanders while giving the more cautious ones an excuse to stay in garrison. (S NF)

36. Lack of adequate ground and air mobility exacerbates the supply situation and undercuts the armed forces maneuver capability. For some large-scale operations, government forces have taken three days to move into position, enabling insurgent forces to escape before they could be engaged. Transport is also lacking for reinforcements responding to guerrilla attacks. The Salvadorans have only 66 heavy trucks, and of 16 UH-1H transport helicopters available in most of 1983, usually only eight were operational. Even if all were operational, the total lift capacity would be adequate to move fewer than two companies from any of the so-called quick-retaliation battalions. (S NF)

37. Moreover, maintenance capabilities are limited and overly centralized. Salvadoran mechanics are considered highly skilled but in short supply. The availability of spare parts is inadequate and equipment turnaround times are excessive. (S NF)

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40. The number of junior officers has been increased through US assistance, but they have not always been effectively employed. Competent field-grade officers remain in short supply as a result of the small size of the officer corps at the war's outbreak—during the 1960s and 1970s, the Salvadoran military academy generally graduated only some 20 cadets a year. A professional noncommissioned officer corps was never developed. (S NF)

41. In the enlisted ranks, the skill level is subject to constant attrition as conscripts complete their tours and return to civilian life. Of the 1,000 men trained in the Atlacatl Battalion by the United States in 1981, over 80 percent are now out of the Army. Consequently, new battalions undergoing organization more often are filled with new recruits rather than seasoned veterans. This development probably contributed to the defeats suffered by the two departmental "hunter" battalions during the guerrilla offensive this fall. (S NF)

42. Moreover, military communications and procedures are poor, and engaged units often cannot count on fire support, reinforcement, extraction, or medical evacuation. Command and control concepts are antiquated. Span of control is excessive, and coordination among departments and within maneuver forces is inadequate. This is due in part to training and equipment shortfalls but also to attitudinal and institutional problems within the officer corps. (S NF)

Attitudinal and Institutional Problems

43. The quality of the Salvadoran officer corps is relatively high by regional standards, but ingrained military traditions and a reluctance to change for tactical and political reasons impair its ability to pursue the war effort optimally. (S NF)

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44. A highly developed military education system—employing both internal institutions and foreign training—has produced a generally high-caliber officer corps, but internal doctrinal thinking has lagged. The Salvadorans still rely on conventional military doctrine taught during the first half of the 20th century. These concepts served the Salvadorans well in their 1969 border war with Honduras but are poorly adapted to counterinsurgency operations. The concept of small-unit tactics is a relatively new idea not well instilled in the officer corps. (S, NF)

45. The government forces, moreover, do poorly at incorporating lessons learned into tactical doctrine and performance. A relief column responding to an October attack on Tejutepeque was ambushed no less than five times as it proceeded up the middle of the same road without flank security or any attempt to avoid or bypass insurgent strongpoints.

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49. The officer corps' traditional cooperation with the economic elite, combined with its [redacted] frustration with the war effort, have left the armed forces highly susceptible to rightist influence. While intent on rolling back reforms needed to assure popular support, the right shares the military's frustration on the progress of the war, as well as the feeling of a number of key officers who favor a "no holds barred" approach to dealing with the guerrillas. Moreover, parties to the right of the Christian Democrats are generally not seen as a threat to the military institution. These factors have become increasingly important aspects in the political dynamics of the officer corps and armed forces leadership problems that have undercut the prosecution of the war. (S, NF)

Officer Corps Politics

50. The political dynamics of the Salvadoran military are based on an intricate system of personal relationships that begin in an officer's own academy class, or *tanda*, and extend outward to other classes. It is accepted that *tanda* leaders will rise to the top command posts, with one most likely becoming president. Concurrently, it is understood that senior officers will make way for members of more junior *tandas* to assume the key positions. Consequently, advancement traditionally has been based more on a combination of loyalty and intrigue than merit, and the system is constantly under pressure from ambitious up-and-coming officers. (C, NF)

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51. The colonels who command the country's 14 geographic departments and key functional units have been senior players within this system. They have been responsible for all military and political activity in their departments, which they have run with a minimum of interference from the capital. Echelons of command at brigade or zone level have existed on paper, but traditionally have had little importance. The departmental commanders usually have bypassed them and dealt directly with the minister of defense on all matters. Moreover, because of the personalist nature of the system and the wide span of control, the minister has "presided" rather than "directed," and his power has been dependent on the willingness of these commanders to obey him. (S-SF)

52. Rightist play in officer corps politics was a major factor behind the ouster earlier this year of Defense Minister Jose Guillermo Garcia. From the coup of 1979 until his removal, General Garcia

sought to maintain the existing officer corps system and to use it to build a strong power base. However, the inherent command and control weaknesses of the system impaired the armed forces' transition to successful counterinsurgency tactics.

53. Frustration with the war effort increased, and by late 1982 the officer corps felt strongly that Garcia and his associates had held power too long. Pressure from the 1980s through 1985 was particularly intense, and many of their officers held key battalion commands and were seeking an increased voice in the war effort. In addition, many who lobbied for Garcia's removal had strong rightist views and direct ties to retired Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, himself a former member of the 1963 *tanda*. While the need to maintain US assistance allowed Garcia to survive the rebellion in January 1983 by another 1963 *tanda* member, Lieutenant Colonel Ochoa, the Minister was eventually forced to step down in April. While these machinations went on, the guerrillas again seized the

tactical initiative, overran towns and isolated units, captured over 1,000 weapons, and placed the armed forces decidedly on the defensive. (S-SF)

54. After a three-month delay, the new Minister of Defense, General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, regained the military initiative with the launching of the National Campaign Plan—Operation Masquishuat. However, as the offensive lost momentum, far right elements again played on officer frustration to seek increased influence.

55.

Vides

made sweeping changes in the General Staff and key unit leadership positions and reorganized the chain of command. These moves

indicate that Vides has for the moment obtained the support of the armed forces. In addition, he recently made strong public statements against human rights abuses by the armed forces. (S-SF)

56. Vides's appointments have strengthened leadership and competence in the General Staff and in key field commands, and will probably improve near-term military prospects. Nevertheless, the changes also have enhanced the influence of far right officers. Lieutenant Colonel Sotomayor, who has been implicated in past rightist coup plots, now heads the Arce Battalion, and Lieutenant Colonel Ponce, another ultraconservative, has been named commander of the elite Bellosa Battalion. Similarly, key staff positions in various brigades and battalions are now held by far right officers. While this reflects Salvadoran realities—many of the best field commanders are right of center—the growing far right influence in the military will inevitably impact on national political issues. It could be a destabilizing factor if the Christian Democrats win the March election. Vides has contained the

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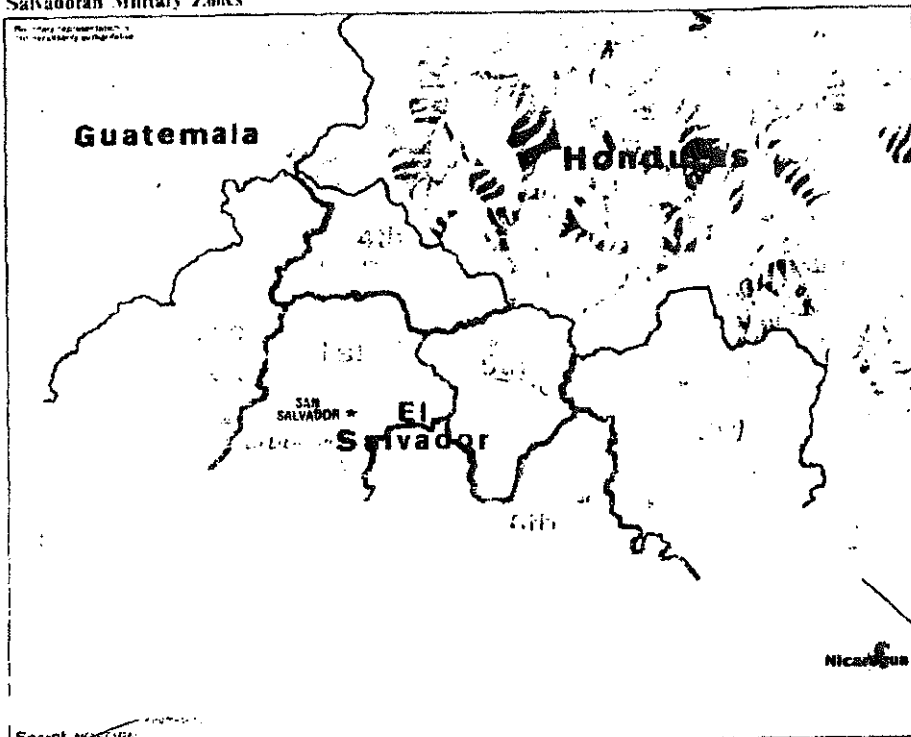
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Figure 2
Salvadoran Military Zones



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first challenge to his authority, but future leadership crises remain probable and will affect the war effort. (S) (NF)

57. The impact of Vides's reorganization on command and control also is uncertain. He has, in theory, subordinated the 14 departmental commanders under six regional zone commands tailored to the disposition of guerrilla forces throughout the country. (See map, figure 2.) It remains to be seen if this latest arrangement will function as well in practice as it looks on paper. Without a parallel decentralization of the existing armed forces logistic and support structures, chances for altering the traditional interface of the departmental commanders with the Minister of Defense and improving tactical coordination between the departments will remain problematic. (S) (NF)

Prospects for Full Mobilization

58. The Salvadoran armed forces can gradually expand with continued US support, but chances for full national mobilization are poor. The Army currently inducts considerably fewer than a third of the 35,000 males reaching military age each year, and these serve for only 24 months. Moreover, another pool of 60,000 males from 16 to 60 with prior active-duty service within five years has not been mobilized, although volunteers are encouraged to serve in the civil defense forces. These two manpower pools in theory could dramatically expand the size of the military, but in practice the effectiveness of such an expanded force would be severely constrained by the shortage of officers, noncommissioned officers, and technicians to lead and maintain the force as well as by a logistic system that is inadequate to support the current force structure. (S) (NF)

59. Full mobilization probably would be opposed by the economic elite and, ironically, the officer corps. Salvadoran military leaders fear full mobilization would lead to the induction of "undesirable" elements,

and others who do not share the officer corps' common values. The economic elite continues to view the insurgency as the military's problem and would resist the full commitment of their sons and fortunes to the war effort. This is symptomatic

of the resistance of the society as a whole to the political, military, and economic reforms needed to defeat the guerrillas. (S) (NF)

Relations With US Personnel

60. The Salvadoran armed forces will remain extremely sensitive to US political developments and will be inclined to cut back the pace of their tactical operations whenever they perceive the possibility of an aid cutoff. However, responsiveness on human rights considerations will remain mixed. Military personnel at most levels understand their war effort depends on good relations with and support from the United States. Nevertheless, they will remain frustrated by absence of an effective legal system to deal with what is seen as a direct terrorist threat to themselves and their families. The perceived need for expediency, combined with extreme rightist influences, will continue to generate some abuses. (S) (NF)

61. The Salvadoran armed forces will remain responsive to the influence of American military training but would resist any US move perceived as taking the conduct of the war out of their hands. They will be eager for technical training but will be more inclined to adapt—rather than to adopt—US tactical concepts. Moreover, Salvadoran officers will continue to want to preserve their institutional prerogatives. Institutional sensitivities also will limit the willingness of Salvadoran officers to accept advice directly from US noncommissioned officers, although these concerns generally will not affect direct training of Salvadoran enlisted men. (S) (NF)

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Prospects for Military Collapse

65. Despite the Salvadoran military's many shortcomings, there is little likelihood the armed forces will collapse in the near term, assuming continued US support. The fate of the Nicaraguan National Guard following the Sandinista victory has convinced Salvadoran officers there would be no room for them under a revolutionary regime or even a negotiated settlement. They will resist any negotiated settlement that leaves insurgent forces intact or provides the guerrillas direct access to power. ~~(S)~~

64. Salvadoran enlisted men have a less vested interest in the military-political system than the officer corps, but they are good troops capable of great endurance. Their morale has been affected by the insurgents' annihilation tactics and surrender calls. Recent reports that inexperienced soldiers gave up while they still had the means to resist are disturbing. Salvadoran troops, however, usually have surrendered only when they faced far superior forces, ammunition supplies ran low, or the prospect for reinforcement was nil. Moreover, the enlisted ranks fought well during the guerrillas' 1981 offensive and distinguished themselves in bloody fighting in the weeks before the 1982 election. When adequately supplied and properly led, they have stopped guerrillas and can do so again. ~~(S)~~

Outlook Through Mid-1984

Pre-election Tactical Situation

63. We believe the FMLN will make its presence increasingly felt in many areas of the country as the election approaches. At a minimum the guerrillas will keep trying to demoralize the Army with annihilation tactics. Ambushes, highway interdiction, and propaganda visits to undefended towns are likely. Urban terrorism will increase and may include bombings, the assassination of government candidates and collaborators, and attacks on US officials. A spectacular raid on a key economic or military target such as Ilopango Airbase cannot be discounted. ~~(S)~~

66. As the election approaches, we judge the guerrillas will concentrate large forces on several key objectives, while smaller elements conduct widespread

harassing attacks to distract government forces and discourage voter turnout. More mortars may be used against urban centers in the period before and during the election. The guerrillas also will be capable of fielding a far larger force than they did in the 1982 election offensive because of an increase in the number of armed insurgents.

67. If the guerrillas decide to seize a liberated zone, we believe their present pattern of attacks in northern El Salvador will continue. The Department of Cabanas may figure prominently in the FMLN strategy. The guerrillas would have to be effective there to provide a credible link between their activities in the northeastern and north-central parts of the country. ~~(S)~~

68. Guerrilla success will continue to depend on the logistic situation and cooperation among the five FMLN factions. If they opt for the liberated-zone strategy, substantial forces will have to be redeployed to the north, and factionalism could undercut needed coordination and support. The guerrillas will need large stocks of ammunition, and a significant percentage of these, particularly for indirect-fire weapons, will have to be made available by their external supporters. In addition, the guerrillas will have to pace themselves tactically and avoid premature expenditure of critical supplies. Aggressive government operations would reduce their ability to accomplish this. ~~(S)~~

69. For their part, the armed forces will again be faced with three missions: to protect the standing economic infrastructure, to provide security for the election, and to take the fight to the guerrillas. Resources and manpower have never been adequate to accomplish all three tasks simultaneously in the face of a large-scale guerrilla offensive. The military is more likely to be successful if it moves aggressively against the guerrillas to preempt rather than react to FMLN strategy and makes better use of available intelligence and mobile patrols to protect vulnerable targets. Should the guerrillas opt for a liberated zone, the military will have to allocate more forces to weak northern and eastern outposts, perhaps at the expense of other areas. ~~(S)~~

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70. Officer corps politics may also influence the military's ability to provide security for the election. While major units are now in the hands of generally competent officers, their staunchly conservative attitudes will make them susceptible to continued far right political machinations. As the election approaches, rightist commanders may become increasingly inclined toward political manipulations designed to influence the election outcome to the detriment of the Christian Democrats. Such activity would distract attention from combat operations and would leave the election process vulnerable to guerrilla military and psychological attacks. ~~(S-NF)~~

Postelection Prospects

71. If the guerrillas score a major success and their logistic situation is good, they will seek to press their advantage to demoralize government forces and increase prospects for the collapse of the new Salvadoran administration. If supplies and outside support are lacking or the insurgents were again soundly defeated, we believe they would fall back to economy-of-force operations. These would include more sabotage, terrorism, and attacks on small, isolated garrisons. In any event, the guerrillas are likely to emphasize political tactics increasingly after the election. If the Christian Democrats lose, the FMLN will attempt to attract dissident party members to its fold to increase its political legitimacy. Conversely, a victory by the Christian Democratic Party would probably precipitate FMLN attempts to undermine the party's relations with the military through disinformation and other means. If the guerrillas have seized a liberated zone, its defense would become paramount. ~~(S-NF)~~

72. If the insurgent offensive fails, the armed forces would have their best opportunity since 1982 to deal the guerrillas a major blow. If the insurgents have made major gains, the military would have to regain momentum quickly to prevent further insurgent advances. The armed forces would be militarily capable of disrupting and eventually eliminating a guerrilla liberated zone. However, their success in this and other operational endeavors would continue to depend on their dedication to the war effort and could be severely impaired by postelection far-rightist political activities. ~~(S-NF)~~

Political and Economic Considerations *

73. The presidential election—now scheduled for 25 March 1984—will have important implications for the military institution and the war effort. No strong, charismatic leader is likely to obtain a clear popular mandate. Any candidate probably will require a coalition to win the backing of the armed forces to survive. Whatever the outcome, the new regime will find it difficult to continue the economic reforms and to improve the human rights situation. This could further undercut domestic and international support for the regime and its counterinsurgency effort. ~~(S-NF)~~

74. The election promises to be one of the most difficult political transitions for El Salvador since the 1979 coup. The machinery for conducting the election has advanced little since the 1982 Assembly contest. Electoral procedures have yet to be codified, and new computers to tabulate the ballots have yet to be installed. Anticipating delays in promulgating a new constitution and formal election law, the Constituent Assembly passed a temporary electoral decree in November that leaves open the issues of whether a national voter registration must be completed before the election or whether municipal and legislative posts will also be contested. ~~(S)~~

75. None of the parties preparing for the March balloting appears to have enough voter strength to get a majority on its own. The results of the Constituent Assembly elections in March 1982 and subsequent legislative voting patterns suggest the likelihood of two alliances in the event of a runoff election between the two top contenders. A centrist grouping might be formed by the Christian Democrats, the small Democratic Action, and possibly the old official Party of National Conciliation. A strongly conservative alliance, meanwhile, might form around the Nationalist Republican Alliance—ARENA—of Roberto D'Aubuisson and include the small Salvadoran Popular Party and the new Authentic Institutional Party. None of these parties are yet committed to any coalition, however, and all are expected to promote individual candidates on the first ballot. ~~(S)~~

* These considerations will be addressed in a future estimate on El Salvador. ~~(S-NF)~~

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76. Rightwing death squad activity and other forms of intimidation also have been increasing in recent months. If unchecked, they threaten to stifle the development of a moderate consensus in national politics. The current trends point to a 1984 election campaign plagued with debilitating terrorism by extremists of both left and right, which could reduce voter participation and increase political polarization.

77. Moreover, guerrilla attacks on crops, factories, roads, and bridges have cost El Salvador well over \$600 million in direct damage and production losses since 1979, according to US Embassy estimates. Such deterioration suggests at least another 5-percent loss in economic output next year, despite nearly \$500 million of foreign aid that is already earmarked for 1984. Although steadily worsening economic conditions may detract from guerrilla propaganda efforts to win popular support, they probably will also cut into government efforts to that end and may bolster the hardline policies of ultrarightist political groups as the country moves toward the election. ~~(S)~~

Implications for the United States

78. The relative combat power of the opposing forces in El Salvador will continue to depend on a variety of factors including their respective manpower, firepower, logistics, mobility, communications tactics, training, leadership, and morale. The Salvadoran military is now facing effective battalion-size guerrilla forces. The military will have to be expanded to contend with this increased threat, but increases in its manpower and firepower alone will not give it a decisive advantage, at least in the near term. ~~(S)~~

79. Parallel improvements, quantitative and qualitative, will be needed for the Salvadoran military to maneuver its forces effectively and responsively to stop and preempt the guerrillas. Significant increases in the mobility of strategic reserve units, enhanced training of departmental troops, and better communications will be required. Achievement of these changes will need increased and sustained US military assistance over the long term. ~~(S)~~

80. Nevertheless, US aid alone will not be able to remedy all the Salvadoran military's shortcomings. The Salvadoran officer corps must demonstrate greater flexibility and a determination to solve the armed forces' structural and institutional problems if US assistance is to be used effectively and the war effort pursued optimally. ~~(S)~~

81. The actions of the extreme right will be as destabilizing to US objectives in El Salvador as those of the Soviet- and Cuban-supported extreme left. Far right terrorism and efforts to roll back reforms can serve only to strengthen the guerrilla forces politically and militarily. Meanwhile, rightist machinations within the officer corps will continue to distract the military from needed operations, undercut its leadership, and provide opportunities for new guerrilla advances. Unless the extreme right is held in check, its activities will continue seriously to impair the war effort. ~~(S)~~

82. Without improvements to Salvadoran military capabilities, solutions to the officer corps' attitudinal problems, and neutralization of extreme rightist influences, the country's ability to defeat the insurgents will be poor over the long term. ~~(S)~~

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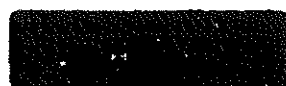
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ANNEX C

US Training of Salvadoran Armed Forces

Location	Trainees/Type of Training	Time Frame
United States	5 helicopter pilots	1980
	1 aircraft maintenance technician	1980
	1 aircraft maintenance technician	1981
	1 immediate reaction battalion (960 members)	Jan-May 1982
	4 helicopter pilots	Aug-Oct 1982
	480 officer candidates	Feb 1982
	240 NCOs	Feb 1982
	500 officer candidates	Jun-Sep 1983
	3 communications technicians	1983
	9 helicopter pilots	1983
Panama	NCO academy	Aug 1981-Nov 1983
	Aircraft maintenance	Aug 1981-ongoing
	Communications	Aug 1981-ongoing
	Long-range reconnaissance patrol	Oct 1982-Nov 1983
	Cadet course (144 students)	Nov-Dec 1983
	Naval commandos	Oct 1982-ongoing
El Salvador	2 immediate-reaction battalions	Mar 1 1981/summer 1982
	Battalion upgrade	Late 1982-ongoing
	Operational planning	Spring 1983-Nov 1983
	Operational planning	Jan-June 1984 (planned)
	Maritime upgrade	July 1981-ongoing
	Aircraft maintenance	Feb 1981-ongoing
	Helicopter support	Sep 1983-ongoing
	Tactical intelligence	Feb 1981-ongoing
	Helicopter pilot instruction	Feb 1981-ongoing
	Logistics and maintenance	Nov 1983-ongoing
	Communications	Feb 1981-ongoing
	Long-range reconnaissance patrol	Jan 1983-ongoing
	Artillery (POI, maintenance, reports)	Nov 1983-ongoing
	Security site survey	Jul 1982-ongoing
Medical	Aug 1983-ongoing	
Honduras	1 immediate-reaction battalion	Jul 1983-Sep 1983
	4 Cazador battalions	Jul 1983-ongoing
	9 Cazador battalions	Jan-Oct 1984 (planned)

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ANNEX D

Security Assistance to El Salvador,
Fiscal Years 1981-83

Major items delivered	FY 81	FY 82	FY 83	Total
Pistol, cal 45, M1911A1		225		225
Rifle, 5.56-mm, M16	5,114	11,476	8,328	24,918
Rifle, sniper, cal .30, M1D		16	65	81
Machinegun, 7.62-mm, M60	146	104	372	622
Machinegun, cal .50, M2		84	6	90
Grenade launcher, 40-mm, M79	418	114	392	924
Grenade launcher, 40-mm M203			54	54
Mortar, 60-mm	60	40	12	112
Mortar, 81-mm	30	6	4	40
Rifle, recoilless, 90-mm	72	41	150	263
Howitzer, 105-mm, M102			12	12
Armament subsystems	10	13	2	25
A-37 attack aircraft		6		6
O-2A reconnaissance aircraft		4		4
C-123 transport aircraft		2		2
Helicopter, UH-1H	10	13	4	27
Truck, shop van, M109			2	2
Truck, fuel	5			5
Trailer, water	6			6
Ambulance, 1/4-T	6			6
Radio set	28	213	650	891
Night vision sight			116	336
Night vision goggles, AN/PVS-5			39	39
Bailey bridge		4		4

Major Items Undelivered and Delivery Forecast

Howitzer, 105-mm, M102, rebuilt	12 in 3rd quarter FY 84
Grenade launcher, M203	200 in 2nd quarter FY 84
Radio set, AN/PRC-77	111 (not yet on contract)

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